

Secret

25X1



Intelligence Memorandum

Perspectives on a Cease-fire in Vietnam

Secret
27

8 September 1972
No. 2067/72

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
8 September 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

PERSPECTIVES ON A CEASE-FIRE IN VIETNAM

The fighting in Vietnam grinds on amid increasing evidence of Communist preparations to continue the war at a high level this fall. Yet there is also growing anticipation in many quarters that some resolution of the conflict--involving a cease-fire--will soon be achieved. The Central Intelligence Agency is not in a position to discuss the specifics of any negotiations on Vietnam that may presently be underway. In this paper, however, we will discuss the intelligence information bearing on Hanoi's attitude toward a cease-fire, and the advantages and disadvantages which Hanoi might see in a cease-fire situation. We will also examine the unusually large number of reports of Communist preparations for a post-cease-fire situation that have cropped up over the past three months and attempt to explain the reasons why cease-fire seems to be such an active subject of discussion within the Communist hierarchy.

SECRET

25X1

I. The Pressures on Hanoi

The Battlefield Situation

1. There seems little doubt that Hanoi had high hopes for dramatic military and psychological results from its 1972 offensive. It seems to have calculated, particularly on the basis of experience in Lam Son 719, that it could cope on the battlefield with allied tactical airpower and helicopter mobility through the use of heavy concentrations of antiaircraft artillery. And it counted on its own artillery, tanks, and determined infantry to out-fight the ARVN on the ground. Hanoi's hope was that ARVN would suffer a series of defeats which would shake its confidence, that Communist units would fan through the countryside to disrupt pacification, and that the GVN's prestige would fall ever lower in the US. The combination of these developments, it was hoped by North Vietnam's leaders, would put Hanoi in the driver's seat by this fall.

2. Obviously, these hopes have not been realized due to a combination of stubborn ARVN resistance, Communist tactical errors, and the effectiveness of US air action against the NVA. In addition, on top of Communist disappointments in the South came the renewal of US bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of the principal North Vietnamese harbors. Hanoi certainly must have weighed the possibility of a renewal of the bombing, but its subsequent scope and precision, plus the mining of the harbors, must have come as an unexpected shock. Moreover, these actions have caused serious physical and psychological strains throughout the North. Hanoi has evidenced more concern than heretofore that mounting battlefield casualties, coupled with the bombing and the American psywar campaign might cause serious stresses in public morale.

3. Hanoi's disappointments and concerns do not mean, however, that the leadership is necessarily disheartened, near the end of its rope, or pessimistic concerning its longer term prospects in South Vietnam. Indeed, from Hanoi's point of view, it can be argued with considerable logic that the North Vietnamese

25X1

position at present is considerably improved over that of 1970-71. Base areas and logistical routes through southern Laos and eastern Cambodia, for example, are more secure than ever before. Serious ARVN incursions into these areas are increasingly unlikely; as for the FANK, its operations now constitute little more than an occasional nuisance. NVA troops are present in South Vietnam in greater strength than a year ago and to date have successfully resisted ARVN efforts to push them back over the borders. Despite a high casualty rate among Communist forces in the South, there is little evidence of a manpower shortage. Nor are there solid indications that the NVA faces major supply constraints in South Vietnam. Despite the continuing interdiction of their internal transportation system, the North Vietnamese have been able to move sufficient supplies to maintain effective support of their troops at the front. Indeed, the Communists appear to be preparing for a new round of intensified military activity in the near future. And there is no clear evidence of serious morale problems among the North Vietnamese population. In short, the Communists appear to have both the wherewithal and the determination to continue fighting.

Sino-Soviet Support

4. One key to Hanoi's ability to continue fighting has been the materiel support it has received from the Soviet Union and China. There is little question that Hanoi was upset by the willingness--even eagerness--of Moscow and Peking to meet with President Nixon, while North Vietnam was engaged in a war with the US. In particular, Hanoi was disturbed by the tepid reaction of its allies to the American bombing and mining of North Vietnam. The Soviets and Chinese not only chose to avoid a direct challenge to the US blockade but continued to give priority to the cautious adjustment of their relations with the US. The Soviets displayed annoyance with North Vietnam's escalation of the fighting and apparently urged the DRV leadership to modify their demands and negotiate a compromise settlement before the American election. Chou En-lai has preached more obliquely on the benefits of a negotiated settlement.

5. But diplomatic pressures devoid of logistical constraints are not likely to have a major impact on Hanoi's planning. The North Vietnamese have never taken their allies totally into their confidence, basically because they have little trust in either of them. Over the years, Hanoi's reaction to its allies' fraternal advice has ranged from deafness to hostility. Hanoi is well aware that Moscow and Peking place higher priority on other objectives in their current maneuvering with the US than on the war and suspects that their advice does not necessarily have North Vietnamese interests at heart. This year's summit meetings have reinforced Hanoi's fears of great-power connivance that would undercut North Vietnam's basic objectives.

6. The North Vietnamese leaders, however, remain acutely sensitive to any signs of diminishing interest on the part of their allies, and are vulnerable to threats, implicit or explicit, that hint at a serious cutback in logistical assistance. Their sensitivity has been reflected in a number of statements and articles in recent months which have emphasized North Vietnam's role as the vanguard of the proletarian revolution, a theme stressed heavily in Pham Van Dong's 2 September (National Day) speech. As the one nation actively engaged in fighting imperialism, Hanoi's leaders see themselves "entitled" to be fully supported by their Communist brethren. (This is another thesis which was also pointedly stressed by Pham Van Dong on 2 September.)

7. Current Sino-Soviet efforts to move supplies into the DRV, as well as recent agreements for supplementary aid, have probably reassured the North Vietnamese that while they may be slighted, they will not be abandoned. China and the Soviet Union apparently have resolved their difficulties in coordinating supply activities. Soviet ships now unload in Chinese ports. A newly constructed pipeline in the DRV is facilitating shipments of petroleum products; other supplies are moving steadily by road and rail from China, while a small percentage is moving in by lighters from Chinese ships anchored outside the minefields. In our judgment

25X1

North Vietnam at this point is receiving sufficient imports (on an average daily basis) to meet its minimum economic needs as well as to provide sufficient supplies for its military forces in the South to continue the war with periodic high levels of activity.

8. Hanoi probably is reasonably confident that this commitment will continue at least into next year. The North Vietnamese probably reason that neither Moscow nor Peking wants to risk being tagged as the instrument of North Vietnam's failure. And their continuing rivalry for regional influence, which has worked to Hanoi's benefit in the past, still argues against either abandoning the field. The North Vietnamese, however, are likely to remain nervous about the constancy of their allies' support, particularly in light of Hanoi's distaste for what it views as Moscow's and Peking's "coziness" with Washington.

The US Election

9. Although Hanoi's leaders are paying close attention to the US election, the record of past years argues that this factor is not paramount in their calculations. Hanoi views all US politicians with suspicion and is leery about whether any US president actually would carry out his campaign "promises." Nonetheless, Hanoi has indicated its clear preference for Senator McGovern's position on the war, and if he appeared to have a good chance of winning, the North Vietnamese would not be inclined to make any negotiating concessions before the election.

10. But, in fact, Hanoi seems to assume that President Nixon will be re-elected. This strengthens the possibility that the North Vietnamese might calculate that they would have a better chance of gaining concessions from Washington before the election than afterward, when they might face a tougher administration stance. This appears to be the "advice" that the Soviets, and perhaps the Chinese as well, have given Hanoi. These considerations may have encouraged the Communists to continue probing Washington's position through meetings with Dr. Kissinger and various other informal contacts.

25X1

25X1

Psychological Intangibles

11. Added to these practical considerations are certain basic psychological factors. The North Vietnamese leaders have been engaged in the struggle to create a unified Communist Vietnamese state virtually all of their adult lives and have adapted to the pressures exerted against them. Struggle has literally become a way of life for them rather than a temporary discomfort. Their stubbornness is reinforced by an absolute conviction of the righteousness of their cause and their Marxist faith in the inevitability of its ultimate success. Furthermore, as Hanoi constantly reminds the world, the Vietnamese people have historically defeated their enemies by simply outlasting them. Thus, as Ho Chi Minh maintained, Hanoi will win if only because it has more patience than the frustrated American adversary.

12. Unless they could negotiate a package deal which they believed would quickly lead to ultimate victory in the South, the Communist leaders' outlook on the struggle might make it difficult for them to agree to a cease-fire proposal. Although we know little about the dynamics of decision-making within the North Vietnamese Politburo, there now seems to be no single leader with sufficient power and prestige to reverse direction on such matters without serious challenge from his peers. The Politburo balance appears such that a basic shift in policy would result in some individual or group within the hierarchy gaining status at the expense of those overruled, thus jeopardizing the fabric of unity that has marked the Politburo's collegial structure since Ho's death. This fact, coupled with the belief that time ultimately is on their side, could reinforce the Communist leadership's reluctance to accept any cease-fire which does not simultaneously offer a clear shot at gaining political control in South Vietnam.

25X1

25X1

II. Reports from South Vietnam vs Hanoi's Public Position

The Reports

13. Intelligence reports from the COSVN area of South Vietnam over the last month or so have contained two major themes: (a) COSVN is making preparations for the contingency of an early cease-fire; and (b) COSVN is preparing for expanded and more intense military action during the period September-October. These reports lead naturally to speculation that Hanoi may intend to make the compromises in its position necessary to bring about a negotiated suspension of the fighting before the US election. In the interim, under this line of speculation, it is attempting to put its forces--military and administrative--in the most advantageous position before a cease-fire goes into effect.*

14. Some of these reports [redacted] but many of them contradict each other on certain specifics, particularly in regard to possible shifts in Communist negotiating demands. In some cases, moreover, the information comes third or fourth hand. [redacted]

25X1

25X1
25X1

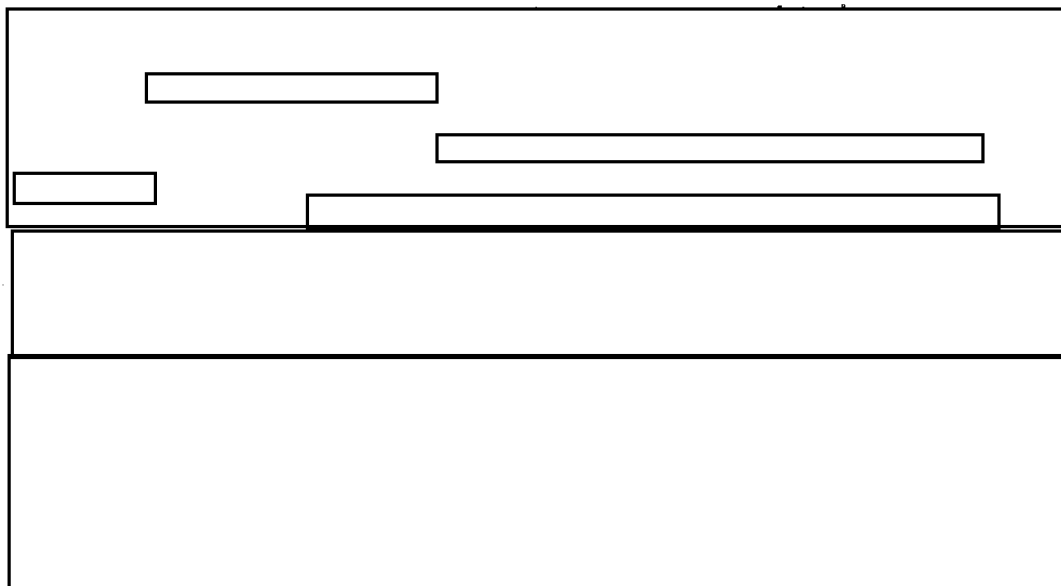
25X1

25X1

SECRET

25X1

at, but in retrospect, it seems plausible that the Communist attitude reflected hopes for major concessions from Washington, stimulated by the advent of a new US administration, the vociferousness of anti-war sentiment, and the initial announcement of US troop withdrawals.



25X1

25X1

25X1
25X1

The Public Statements

18. In general, public statements from Hanoi have been the most useful indicators of trends in the leadership's thinking. A consistent element in all such statements has been Hanoi's insistence on a concurrent military and political settlement, rather than an arrangement that would simply permit the US to withdraw its forces (in exchange for a prisoner release), and leave political adjustments to be settled among the Vietnamese. A North Vietnamese broadcast on 13 August addressed the problem in this way,

"...one cannot deal only with the military problems without speaking of the political problem. To cease fire or to release the captured soldiers are only concrete acts; the political objective is the only problem of decisive significance."

SECRET

25X1

25X1

Communist doubts were further expressed in the same broadcast:

"No one naively believes that if there is a cease-fire, if the Americans withdraw their troops and if the captured soldiers are released, the Vietnamese people will be able to solve their own political problems..."

A recent Nhan Dan "Commentator" article, while ambiguous in some respects, reiterated the argument--"the military and political problems are inseparable and must be settled simultaneously" before a cease-fire can be put into effect.

19. Hanoi has not clarified the nature or, especially, the details of what it might be willing to consider as an acceptable political arrangement in Saigon. The North Vietnamese have clearly and consistently demanded the establishment of a coalition government, although how much of the existing GVN structure could remain in such a coalition government has not been clear. Hanoi has always been firm on its demand that coalition be part of a settlement, but now, however, Hanoi is floating hints that US acceptance of the "principle" of coalition might be sufficient to open the way to a cease-fire. In the aforementioned Nhan Dan "Commentator" article, however, the US role in any political adjustment is blurred. While the article maintains that the US must end its support of the Thieu administration, the tone is less strident than in many past statements and appears to invite further discussion on the parameters of future American assistance. The structure of a coalition government is left to discussion between the Communists and the Saigon administration. The question remains--what must that Saigon administration look like before the Communists will talk to it? Nevertheless, the deliberate ambiguity suggests at least the chance of some flexibility in Hanoi's position.

20. A degree of ambiguity on the political framework of a settlement was also evident in Pham Van Dong's National Day speech on 2 September. The standard requirement for an "all-inclusive solution" was reaffirmed, and, in the military sphere, Dong took a hard intransigent line. He demanded an end to all US air, naval, and ground military activity

-10-

25X1

in both Vietnams..."no matter where these activities come from," the total withdrawal of all American and allied military personnel (including advisers), the dismantling of American bases, and the termination of all US military assistance to the Saigon government. The political prerequisites, however, were not spelled out precisely. The North Vietnamese demand that the Saigon government dismantle its "repressive machinery" was missing. Dong reiterated that the US must end its support of the "puppet administration" and "agree to the establishment of a three-segment coalition government," but he did not specifically mention elections in this context. The clearest departure from previous North Vietnamese pronouncements at this level is the absence of any specific reference to Thieu's fate, though it is hard to imagine how Thieu could survive if Dong's other points were conceded.

III. Is a "May 8"-Type Cease-fire to Hanoi's Advantage?

21. From Hanoi's perspective, a simple cease-fire--even coupled with a complete withdrawal of American forces--could prove dangerous. US aid to the GVN, both military and political, would presumably continue, and ARVN would be given a respite to rebuild its forces, especially the elite units currently bearing the brunt of the fighting in the northern provinces. And so long as ARVN held together, in the Communist view, the GVN could resist any motion toward a settlement that would give the Communists a substantial political role in Saigon, even in the face of urgings (or threats) from Washington. The North Vietnamese leaders, moreover, may no longer be so confident that an end to active US military involvement would inevitably lead to the prompt collapse of the GVN. As the situation now stands, a cease-fire in place would give the Communist military forces little more than a foothold in the populated areas of South Vietnam.

22. A cease-fire might also work against Hanoi's efforts to counter the government's control in the countryside. The struggle against "pacification" during any cease-fire would come to depend largely on

25X1

the effectiveness of the party apparatus among the population. And the Communists have evidenced increasing concern about the size and pervasiveness of the GVN's own security and control apparatus. Furthermore, despite indications that the Communist political infrastructure has begun to recover from the devastating losses suffered in the 1968 campaign, its ability to mount an effective challenge to government control in many areas is doubtful, particularly if the GVN were no longer distracted by main-force fighting. Party cadre are currently being urged to prepare for this kind of post-cease-fire struggle, but where Communist gains have been made thus far, the NVA's muscle has provided the boost.

23. Nonetheless, Hanoi might perceive some advantages in a cessation of the fighting. Communist forces would be able to rest and refit, rebuild their infrastructure, and consolidate their control over the areas they occupied. An end to the bombing and mining program would ease the strains and suffering of the North Vietnamese as well as facilitate supply efforts both into the DRV and to Communist forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In addition, Hanoi may feel that an American military withdrawal in itself would remove a major prop from the South Vietnamese government. Despite the growing effectiveness of the Vietnamese air force, ARVN continues to feel a strong psychological dependence on US air power. If this support is removed, ARVN's confidence and resolve could slip badly.

24. The argument for a cease-fire might be improved in Hanoi's eyes if its forces made substantial gains on the battlefield in the next phase of the offensive or if large enough areas of South Vietnam were simply conceded to the Communists in some sort of cease-fire partition. Hanoi might then anticipate the start of a political unravelling of the Thieu regime. American acceptance of a rival to the Thieu administration (in a partition situation) would be interpreted by all Vietnamese parties as a significant diminution of political support for the GVN, even if US material assistance continued.

25X1

IV. In Sum...

25. Hanoi does not seem to be under any compelling pressure to curtail its military campaign in the South or to offer major political concessions simply to gain a cease-fire. The bombing and mining programs have not imposed unmanageable burdens on the home front. Hanoi's allies have not cut off vital supplies, and Communist forces in the South, while not making spectacular progress at this time, are standing up to the pressure of the bombing and counterassaults by the ARVN. Thus, the chances of the North Vietnamese accepting a compromise settlement that is not, in their opinion, weighted in their favor seem very slim; and they are likely to remain unexcited by any US proposal which they do not believe will give them eventual control of South Vietnam. The spectre of the 1954 Geneva Conference, which they believe snatched hard-won victory from their grasp, still looms very large in North Vietnamese thinking.

26. In our view, then, although Hanoi clearly is weighing the modalities and consequences of a cease-fire, this is probably predicated on the belief that the US sooner or later will meet minimum Communist demands for a settlement. There may be movement in Hanoi's private negotiating position of which we are not aware. The evidence available to us, however, indicates that despite cease-fire rumors and maneuverings, Hanoi's reluctance to accept the military half of the loaf, with only an option--however promising--on the political half, coupled with the continuing ability of the Communists to fight on, makes a cease-fire in the near term appear doubtful.

25X1

Approved For Release 2005/05/23 : CIA-RDP79R00967A001500040002-0

Next 11 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2005/05/23 : CIA-RDP79R00967A001500040002-0